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Press information:

*The Following are excerpts from George Bernard Shaw's article on Elizabeth Barrett Browning an article which appeared in the 1874 Cornhill Magazine, pp. 471-90
It was taken for this press release from the Victorian Web on 4/23/04
<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/ebb/cornhill.html>*

[Elizabeth Barrett Browning] has demonstrated what emotional poetry really means...and it cannot be said, either, that she has altogether come short in the matter of design -- the design which stamps the greatest poets. ...Her history, sparse as it is in facts as yet given to the world, is one of intense interest. It is well known how that existence with her was almost one long round of continuous suffering... Her own sufferings could never daunt her in the pursuit of learning, and accordingly we find that as a scholar she was distinguished for the ripest erudition.

...The human heart first, and Nature afterwards, were the teachers at whose feet our poet learned the deep lessons she subsequently transmitted to her species. By these were fostered in her a tenderness which breathes through all her writings, and whose spirit is mirrored therein as the blue sky mirrors itself upon the bosom of the deep.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning' Life

Elizabeth Barrett Browning was born in London, in the year 1809...At a very early age she had written much that was worthy ... Miss Mitford has described her as a "slight, delicate figure, with a shower of dark curls falling on each side of a most expressive face, large tender eyes, richly fringed by dark eye-lashes, and a smile like a sunbeam." [473/474] She possessed a grace and delicacy which almost defied representation.

With so perfect a mental and spiritual organization it was not given, to her to be equally blessed in the physical. Always frail... The extremest care preserved her life, though the incident was succeeded by a long period of weakness and suffering... For seven long years this period of seclusion lasted; but during that time Miss Barrett devoured all the books she could bring within her reach, and cultivated the art which was afterwards to bring her immortality.

In 1846, that is, when she was in her thirty-seventh year, came the principal event of her life...her marriage to Robert Browning. He bore her away to Italy, where softer

skies brought back that health which had so long forsaken her in her native land! The union was most felicitous... [Elizabeth Barrett] Browning died in Florence in 1861...

One beneficial result of the comparative seclusion of Mrs. Browning's life was the habit of introspection which it induced, and which, fortunately for posterity, led to the production of some of the finest subjective poetry extant...

Aurora Leigh

From her earliest years ... Mrs. Browning appears to have had the passion for books -- a passion which is referred to more than once in **Aurora Leigh**... How must her fragile frame have thrilled when, in the course of her reading, as she says --

Because the time was ripe,
I chanced upon the poets.

[**Aurora Leigh**] is a poem which we could imagine Shakespeare dropping a tear over for its humanity... Were we not amazed with the beauty and fulness of its poetry, we should be struck with its philosophy...

Get leave to work
In this world --'tis the best you get at all
For God, in cursing, gives us better gifts
Than men in benediction. God says "Sweat
For foreheads," men say "crowns," and so we are
crowned,
Ay, gashed by some tormenting circle of steel
Which snaps with a secret spring.
Get work, get work;
Be sure 'tis better than what you work to get.

[In **Aurora Leigh**] the author's views on Art are set forth with some fulness. Art, ...[488/489] ... notwithstanding all the darkness which has been cast around it by much speaking, means (if we are bound to describe it as concisely as possible) the closest and most perfect realization of the various forms of Truth which it is in the power of man to attain. Some such idea as this certainly possessed the mind of Mrs. Browning; and it was her opinion that that was real art which assisted in any degree to lead back the soul to contemplate God, the supreme Artist of the universe. Yet Art...was not the highest, the ultimate--

Art is much, but Love is more!
Art, my Art, thou'rt much, but Love is more!
Art symbolises heaven, but Love is God
And makes heaven.

...In this poem we have a vantage ground from which we survey the panorama of human life, illustrated by the sun of genius. To attempt to extract its beauties would be futile; it is a garden in which every flower of sweetness blooms. Its aroma is amongst the most fragrant in literature...

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Stature as a Poet

A dispassionate examination of the poems of Elizabeth Barrett Browning can, we maintain, only lead to this result -- that she is the equal of any poet of our time in genius...As long as one human heart throbs for another she will be held in high esteem. Her poetry is that which refines, chastens, and elevates. We could think that with herself, as with one of her characters, "some grand blind Love came down, and groped her, clasped her with a kiss; she learnt God that way."...

G. B. S

For More Information on EBB and **Aurora Leigh**

<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/barrett/aurora/aurora.html>

<http://www.umilta.net/ebb.html>

<http://eir.library.utoronto.ca/rpo/display/poem243.html>

<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/carlyle/carlylelr2.html>

<http://www.todayinliterature.com/biography/elizabeth.barrett.browning.asp>

<http://www.literaryhistory.com/19thC/BROWNING.htm>

<http://www.lelettere.it/301350/327aurora.html>

<http://www.poets.org/poets/poets.cfm?prmID=153>

<http://www.classicreader.com/author.php/aut.162/>

<http://www.browninglibrary.org/ebrowning.htm>

http://www.poetry-archive.com/b/browning_elizabeth_barrett_bibliography.html

<http://jollyroger.com/zz/ypoetry3d/BarrettBrowning,Elizabethhall/cas/7.html>

<http://www.cswnet.com/~erin/ebblink.htm>

<http://www.poetsgraves.co.uk/barret- browning.htm>

<http://www.members.cox.net/matt.jolly/browning/ebb/elizabeth.html>

Aurora Leigh will be presented at **Primary Stages** on

Monday, June 7, 2004

Time: 7:30 pm

Place: 45th Street Theatre

FREE

(354 West 45th Street, between 8th & 9th Avenues)